



Polk County Land Information Department

Zoning | Planning | Mapping | Surveyor

100 Polk County Plaza, Suite 130
Balsam Lake, WI 54810

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Sara McCurdy, Director

Location: First Floor Government Center
Number Employees: 9 FT
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There is a wide variety of responsibilities in Land Information but the common theme is that we provide information about the land and guidance on what you can do with it. The department is comprised of 4 divisions (in chronological order): Surveying/Real Property Lister, Zoning, GIS/Mapping, and Planning. Many responsibilities within the department are state mandated. All divisions agree technology has had an impact in recent years. A state mandate requiring a Land Information Officer provided some funding to create part of the department's online presence. This ability to find information electronically has reduced office visits for all divisions.

SURVEYOR. There has been a County Surveyor in Polk County since 1861. The County Surveyor's office is responsible for maintaining and holding survey information. This includes new surveys, old surveys and the original Public Land Survey System (PLSS) corners. The PLSS corners were set up to subdivide and describe property boundaries. Time and development have destroyed, hidden or disturbed some corners. The County Surveyor establishes or reestablishes the lost and destroyed PLSS corners to their proper location. A majority of survey data is used by attorneys, title professionals, real estate professionals and private surveyors, however, many private landowners find survey information useful. The County Surveyor does not do private surveys or move lot lines. The Surveyor's office assists with survey related questions. SURVEYING is about locating, describing, and dividing LAND.

REAL PROPERTY LISTER. The real property lister/analyst moved to the Division of Surveyor 3 years ago. Many people may not know this position exists but often see the results in the "tax roll". The real property lister maintains accurate ownership records of property by keeping a record of who has written title to property in Polk County. She provides a bridge between survey and treasurer, a bridge to facilitate assessment questions, and verifies property transfers with the state Department of Revenue. PROPERTY LISTING is about maintaining records of who owns the LAND.

ZONING. The first land use permit in Polk County was issued in 1967. Zoning is probably the most visible of the divisions and with the most public contact. They administer and enforce land use ordinances. The Shoreland Ordinance is the most prominent due to the number of lakes in Polk County and the public interest in preserving or developing land around the lakes. Zoning also administers and enforces the Sanitary Ordinance which governs private onsite wastewater systems. All ordinances promote and protect the general welfare and hopefully minimize conflict. These sets of rules are set by the County Board but some are guided by state law and the Comprehensive Plan. Ordinance administration requires a lot of education on regulations. It also requires significant time and one on one explanation as each case is unique and how it affects each home owner is different. Building in Polk County peaked in 2005 but has now leveled off. Contrary to some beliefs zoning rules do apply in rural areas. The zoning division also assigns addresses in unincorporated areas which are necessary for emergency services and homeowners. ZONING is about the regulation of how you use LAND.

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GIS. Geographic Information System is a graphic land asset management system. This visible invisible division has existed independently since 2006. It is highly visible with the online digital presence (Interactive GIS Map on the home page) and paper maps but invisible as people may not know where the information is from. GIS provides public access to information about land resources. Electronic and paper maps are created using base data layers such as roads, water bodies, and current and historic aerial photography with additional specialized information as requested. The base layers are complete but are constantly updated. New layers of information are created as needed for projects. Some of the data is from this department and some is generated by other departments. Many data aspects are driven by 911 concerns but the information is also used by the public for work and play. Additional data that is not graphic based may be linked to features in electronic maps. This data can be searched or used for analysis to assist in decision making for multiple departments such as redistricting based on population. GIS is about data management, analysis, and display of information about the LAND.

PLANNING. The planning division is growing and evolving as the current structure has only been around since 2007. Planning provides a framework for guiding decision making rather than being a specific set of rules. Most work is project oriented and has included writing the comprehensive plans, energy planning, farmland preservation planning, and zoning ordinance revisions. Some projects started with an idea or concept that led to a grant application, resulted in receiving a grant, and a complete project. Work may be completed in house by the planner, coordinated with other departments, or contracted with outside services. Project plans may require state review or approval and must meet grant requirements if applicable. Often these projects involve public input which range from committees, meetings, and paper or electronic surveys. One challenge for planning is to use multiple techniques and technology to reach all citizens so that Polk County Plans reflect the desires of the entire community. PLANNING is about facilitating what citizens see as the desired future especially in terms of use of LAND.

All four divisions involve information about the land and the work is often connected. This is a brief (challenging with 4 divisions) overview of the Land Information Department. It is not a comprehensive list but is meant to get you acquainted with what we do for the public and can do for you.